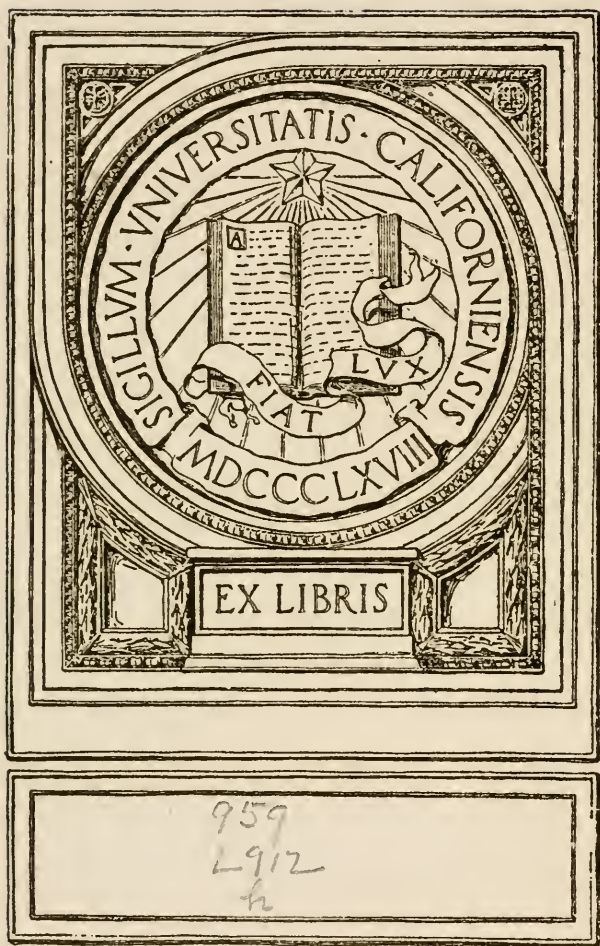


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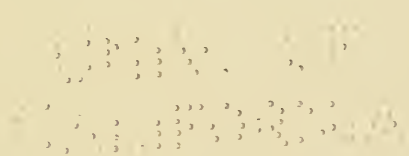
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THE HOUSE THAT WAS

THE HOUSE THAT WAS AND OTHER POEMS

BY
BENJAMIN R. C. LOW

AUTHOR OF
"THE SAILOR WHO HAS SAILED AND OTHER POEMS"
AND
"A WAND AND STRINGS AND OTHER POEMS"



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TO MY
SOME-TIME CRITIC
AND
LIFELONG FRIEND,
WILLARD B. LUTHER

343561

THERE is a beauty, after all is said,
Unreached forever. Not when music dies,
And earth dissolves in rapture of deep sighs;
Not by the dance, down glades of moonlight fled;
Nor poetry, echoing death-chants to the dead,
Is it unveiled: and yet, so near, it lies,
The lonely wanderer feels its faun-like eyes,
And almost has it—by a turn of head.

How like a child grown weary with much play,—
How like the ripples on the wind-carved shore,
He is, who has his will of life, who goes
Arms full of flowers, brimming the stars away.
Beauty, ah, beauty, in one wild June rose . . .
I put my poor pen by, and write no more.

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THE HOUSE THAT WAS

The House That Was

WHO art thou, ghastly creature, grinning clown;
Imbiber of clear death, the ecstasy
Of horror, newly shoveled from the grave?
What irks those burned-out craters, once were
eyes?—

(They stare so steadfast) and that beetled brow,
What roofs it that it wrinkles-on so long?
And wherefore teeth? Thou canst not swallow
food;

Nor hast a tongue to savor with. A dog
Might sniff some virtue in thee, thou rank skull.
There is not; nay!—thy virtue is to rot!
They turned thee out for that.

The House That Was and Other Poems

It is not long,
Not very long ago, new-born, a babe,
Thou wast warm-pillowed on a mother's breast;
Lulled with the lift and droop of it, to sleep,
And blinking puzzled eyes for that the sun
Made friends with thee, a fellow citizen,
When thou didst fall awake at last, to be
One with the wide world, hungry, with reaching
hands.

The world was wide: thou wentest on thy knees,
Doubtless thou didst, a pilgrimage of love
To every corner of it, being still
The veritable great space of one square room:
For thee it was the world.

What made thee stand?
Thy little fingers, clutching on a chair,

The House That Was

Enfranchised thee of fellowship and fee
In all dimensions of the sun and moon,—
Hillocks and grass-deep meadows, and the run
Of open fallows smelling of sweet ground.

There was a window, doubtless, near the dawn,
Where summer mornings looked at thee and
 smiled,
And bird songs, far away, and crowing cocks,
Mingled with sleep, till, happy, drowsy-eyed,
Thou wast awake once more, with dewy grass
And petals of closed flowers, and precious winds
From over seas, that said farewell to stars.

Long evenings waned for thee; and ere thou
 slept
The moon could rise, new-floated, from the trees,
And set thee sailing down long tides away,

The House That Was and Other Poems

Before the twilight ended thee farewell,
Or thou hadst lifted anchor to the dark.
And storm there was, in hours when trees awake,
With touches of strong wind that loosed old
 pain

And comforted itself with tears: then thou
Heardest, half soothed, and half in very awe,
The rush of torrents in the thirsty leaves;
And drowsy benisons of priestly rain.

It must be, when the sun set southward, low,
And frosty nights turned all the meadows brown,
Thou lookedst into heaven, dull, dark and cold,
And wast in raptures that a snowflake fell,
Forerunning winter, in thy hollowed hand.
Nay, surely, thou didst find the first far wings
Of northward swallows, when the fast-locked
 ground

The House That Was

Broke open to the lustiness of spring,
And little leaves were thrusting-points of joy;—
When long-forgotten fragrances once more
Entered the gateways, trooping, like young girls,
And, arm in arm, the songs of summer came.

Thou wast a boy ere childhood wept for thee,
And bathed in brooks or wallowed in warm hay;
Far, windy hill-tops beckoned thee to go
Beyond them, flaming, full of western gold,
And down long lanes, however swift thy feet,
Thy dreams flew faster, shadowed with blown
cloud.

Betimes thy boyhood fell from thee; a lad,
Thou didst no more pluck happiness, alone
On unfrequented feeding-slopes of joy;
But soughtest-out thy fellows, and wast found

The House That Was and Other Poems

With young, gruff voices, emulous to lead.
And now, with finger-tips that touched thine eyes,
First love bewitched thee, just when buds were
new,

And birds broke open beauty in blue sky.
One face was real, of rapture; others came,
Like shadows, in and out the dream, but she
Both sleep and waking sunnied with one smile.

Thus far we follow thee: then thou dost go—
A brook abashed for leafy sanctities—
Into green depths of murmurous surmise.
Only we hear thy music, afterwhiles,
A little space, thy laughter, dying down
To distance, fringed-on with blown sighs
And far-borne voices from a lonely hill.
Dying?—thou art gone.

The House That Was

We know no more;
Save, somewhere, under stars, when twilight fell,
Thy full course led thee, brimming, to the sea,
And lost thee there. Brown skull, we know no
more.

And yet, it may be, piecing here and there
Our dreams of thee, we may bloom back again
Some semblance of an old time certitude,—
The sunset light of what thy noon-days were.

Thou wast a man, and didst drink life, not ease.
The man thou wast most certainly did stand
Face-forward in the open fields of fight:
Thou hast been seaward like a rocky wall
And felt the grinding thunder at thy gates,
When oceans stirred: thy battlements besieged
Have weathered-out the cruel cannon quake,
The crushing stone and sickening, barbed hail:

The House That Was and Other Poems

Thou art all smooth with searching winds of
fate.

Who turned thy face against the multitude,
And set thee in the shadow of defeat?

Why didst thou stand mid-current of them all,
And lift thine eyes to perilous, proud ways?

In autumn twilight 'twas thy wont to turn
Across the fields, and leave thy toil behind;
Plodding the stubbled furrows where the ground
Was caked and dry with sun and little rain,
And breathing smoke-drift from a brushwood
pile

Some woodsman built and covered with dry
leaves;

And often, then, the sky burned up in flame
That smouldered down through glories of heaped
cloud,

The House That Was

To leave at last, in rifts, a molten star.

Thy heart burned also, doubtless, with strong
pain

For beauty that it loved, and could not stay;
And wonder stirred within thee, as if winds,
Long sleeping through the night, remembered
dawn.

And when, some March-bewildered afternoon,
The sun warmed out on rivulets of rain,
And showed the speckled snow, washed, here
and there,

From patches of bare ground where Earth gaped
through,

Brown as a gypsy tattered without shame,
Thou didst exult to breathe the homely sward,
And smell the grass, pale, trampled—but alive.
And sometimes, in sharp winter, on a hill

The House That Was and Other Poems

Well fledged with sombre firs, against clear sky,
The wind blew snow-dust on the frosted snow,
And leaning back for breath, hands over ears,
Thou wast caught up in one sheer rush of joy,
And laughed for living.

There were other times . . .

How many weary hours hast thou starved
through,

With not one spark of jubilant, sweet fire?

No doubt thou didst go singing in the rain,
And trudged on gaily through the driving snow;
But elsewhere there were days with thee, too
utter sad

For any singing; days when winds had died,
And hollow mists shut heaven's breath away:
Days in the ruck of winter, when the snow,
All mired with wheels, lay rotting in the roads,

The House That Was

And nothing came, and no one sang along,
And only out of window were wet trees,
Or sodden snow, or clothes upon a line.

And days there were, we dream, blown past
On driven wings of stormy-scattered cloud,
When hope was killed and panic rode the sky,
Skirling: when trees wept leaves, and tossed, and
cried,

And in the key-hole spirits of the lost
Sang lamentations for their loves who died
Long since, in some grey twilight of bleak
shores,

Far northward, where the world is one wide woe.
There were other times? There were . . .

To lose is hard,
But living out a loss is worse. And thou,

The House That Was and Other Poems

We dream it, even on such stricken days
Drew out a loss to each horizon line,
Till sea and sky an aching emptiness,
The sun sank down and let the hunger go.

What bore thee on, confronting that grey sky,—
That tedious path and pitiless, blind rain?
What urge of patience held thy weary prow
Against the hollows of that homeless sea?

A ringing axe puts edge into the blood :
Is't fancy?—was it thine to swing stout strokes
Upon the bodies of big, burly trees,
And open clearings with their crashing fall;—
To lop the boughs, and sled the log-wood home?
It was; thou didst; oh, surely, old, brown skull.

On many a morning smelling of mild spring,
We picture thee 'a-ploughing, thy two hands

The House That Was

Held hard on handles, guiding the clean share;
Down field and back, not checking save to turn,
Or lift a root that hindered thee; and then,
Back against tree—for comfort, not for shade—
With knife and loaf and water-jug of stone,
Making the mid-day meal with quiet mind.

Not long; for down a windy afternoon

We see thee ploughing still, with chirp and
whoa,

Till shadows lengthen, and the sun dips down
And leaves clear light to dwindle into stars.

Ah, then, unhitching from the plough the team,
Straight-backed at last, with eyes above the
ground,

How happy in thy weariness thou art;

And how the dusk adds welcome to thy door!

Was it thy strength, thy sinews and hard hands,

The House That Was and Other Poems

That made thee tremble when the south winds
blew?

It seemed a trumpet stirred in some far land,
And set thy blood up-answering in flame;
A rally call and reveille that sang
Beyond the world, a thousand years ago:
That sighed and left thee fainter than before.

Once more we dream: late April is it now.
Late April is it; under last year's leaves
The Mayflower hides, and yellow marigolds
In oozy meadows lavish, like the sun,
Their smiles and laughter, clothed-on with clear
joy.

Now every silence is run sweet with streams,
And gurgle notes that scatter into song
From boughs faint budding for the lips of May;
Now windy shadows quicken, and the light

The House That Was

Is blown too high to tremble-out with day,
But lingers to slow stars, and frogs set free
Of old brown marshes wrinkled to the moon.

Late April is it; down the windy lane
And through the wall thou art, with afternoon
And April—and a maid; but only her,
Not afternoon or April, heedest thou—
So sweetly at thy side she is, so dear—
But only her thou heedest, till, just where
The meadow rims, in one grey ledge of stone,
Down sitting at her side, a shyness falls.

Thou dost not hear the brisk-blown junipers,
That stir; the far off cry and answer call
Of scouting crows; the west wind in the grass:
Thou hearest only how thine own two ears
Are beating panic, nor dost trust thine eyes
The venture now so desperate to be done.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Late April is it, and late afternoon;
Along the lane the shadows are unflowed;
A planet walks the hill, and in the sky
The wind blows violets and April green.
Thou heedest not nor heedeth she, at all,
Home-wending, save of eyes.

Where are they gone,
Blind skull; those eyes?—and where indeed is
now

Their sacrificial fire? Down what pale west
Of sloping stars, with what doomed winds were
they
Sent flickering; those torches of delight?

Death lives in silence, ever; not a sound
Of all thou spakest once is left in thee
As in old, ivied walls there lives again,

The House That Was

On windy nights, the wassail and sharp song
Of times long buried and burned out in flame.
Where are they gone; thy wonderful wild
words?—

Thy whispers, broken, and thy pleadings—
where?

Still thou art silent; desolate thou art,
And none there is of all that sang in thee:
Nor ever will be?

Oh, forgetful feet!

Summer has waned once more, and thou, old
skull,

Art thou forgetful of her passing, too?

Did spring pass by, and leave thee nothing new?

Did summer touch thee not? (She went to die.)

Hast thou no tears for autumn, nothing paid

Of her sad price; no dole of sorrowing?

The House That Was and Other Poems

Almost it seems thou art, as once, here gone
Through goldenrod and aster, under leaves
Heart's blood incarnadined. Not long thy feet
Have crushed this moss, this fallen log not long
Has shredded with thy coming; down the glade
It almost seems thy head and shoulders are.
And this same sadness, surely, was thine too,—
Of haze and hilltop and brown, heaped-up grain,
And solemn hush as if old battles were,
A breath might rumor of; one breath too far
Beyond the hills to rumble now of war,
But still remembered and still waited for.

On such a day, we dream, thou wentest down,
Through woody shadows out on open fields,
Child's fingers in each hand. A tumbled wall,
A lane, more woods, a turnpike, farmyards—
then

The House That Was

The quiet village and the village green,
In silence of sweet sabbath soothed with bells.

There in the meeting-house thou sattest down,
Straight-backed and grave beyond thy children's
ken,

Who loved the slanted windows—leaking sky
And dusty chestnut leaves and locust song—
More than the preacher and his deep-toned
prayer.

Through all the sermon thou wast still the same,
Hearing of life hereafter, heaven and hell,
Of righteousness and judgment and the pains
That follow closely on all evil done.

Lift up thy heart?—indeed thou didst do so;
What though thine eyes found beauty most in
law,

The House That Was and Other Poems

And saw worst sin in broken rectitude—
And law *is* beautiful, and sin *is* death—
Thou didst, brave soul, thou didst lift up thy
heart.

Returning over fields, sedate and slow,
Hands behind back, thy children out before,
It must be thou didst breathe, oh, surely, some
Old, pagan joy of fallows, and wide fields
Stacked stiff with grain; of free, soft sky
And children's voices, Indian-ambushing.
It must be, too, the sadness of the time,
The fade of autumn sparing not its hand,—
Of death foreshadowed and not far, prevailed,
And somewhat cried in thee.

Oh, surely, thou
Didst dread to die; to let warm life turn pale

The House That Was

And in thy lips be kissing-bright no more.
Surely there came of thee a pagan prayer
For one deep draught of such a depth in joy,
Oblivion should not blemish it nor time
Set down in dust of bitterness, to die:—
One spark of beauty beaten beyond pain;
One breath of flowers that not just mortal are.

Of what chimed seas on what enchanted shore
Art resonant, thou empty shell, that art
So naked hollow, hearing now no more?
From what grey dawning on a sightless sea
Didst thou set sail? What winds of prophecy
Went with thee?—who prepared thy prow;
By what pale stars who steered thee, moving on
Through dreaming twilights for unfathomed
years?

The House That Was and Other Poems

There was a whisper in thy heart, a song
Older than time, younger than break-of-day;—
The voice of winds in tree-tops before dawn;
Of children, laughing over fields, in June;
Of rain on roofs, at nightfall; of soft waves
Down wet, brown beaches, sighing back to sea;—
Of beauty touched with lips . . . and lost again.

The whisper went, long since: the sound of rain
Is on the roofs at nightfall, still; the leaves
Still, still are murmurous at daybreak; still
Wash the spent waves down beaches as before.
But not for thee: thou hearest not at all.

What went from thee that heard? What echoes
died

In thy deep caves; what ecstasy arose
From thy so silent peaks, and soared in sky?

The House That Was

Out of thy listening, what throated bird;—
From thy still pools, what bubbles of drowned
 song?

Thou art as silent as untroubled strings,
Long mute, a master sang upon; as calm
As a faint, forest lake, where winds have gone
 away.

Thou art a rock dead oceans wrestled with,
And left forever, channeled with their flame,
For winter snows to sleep with, and chill sky.

And yet, there is a sound in thee, cold skull,
Too cobweb-thin for ears, too frail to die.
Such sound as follows singing, when a bird
Has fluted once and flown, and sings no
 more:

Such sound as breathes out petal sighs that fall

The House That Was and Other Poems

When stars touch roses, or a late moon strays
Through sleeping gardens of the long ago.

Yes, there is music in thee; as a stone—
Shed from some ancient capital, and found,
After slow centuries of creeping mould,
All grown with moss and crumbled with decay—
With every broken leaf, in each blurred line,
Sings of its haughty lineage for aye.

Over that arching brow how tenderly
Does time turn back; with what reluctant feet
The wasting seasons pause and pass it by.
How reverent the sunlight is, with those
So empty eyes; how lovingly the gloom
Fills the bare vaults where beauty burned away.

The whisper went: the marks of it remain. . . .
O precious skull, thou art still answering!

A Pathway to the Stars

A SHIP in doldrums, dripped the weather-vane,—
Bereft of wind its gallant sails of gold;
The morning snow had weakened into rain,
And rain turned drizzle by late afternoon,
And now came evening on, and like a swoon,
Out of the sea a slow miasma rolled.

Close to the walls it clung, and blurred away,
Like beetling crags, their dizzy slopes of fire;
Near to the ground it crept along, and lay
Coiled-up for passers-by, or swayed enthralled
Before bright windows, or, reminded, crawled
Its loathsome length above the beaten mire.

The House That Was and Other Poems

The yellow street-lamps swam like moons gone
pale

Behind blown cloud; the river whistles were
A moan of baying monsters on the trail
Of some doomed quarry, questing in the dark.
Such nights smear moss on tombstones, and black
mark
Cold chapel walls, and make death dismaler.

Where two streets joined, out of the murk, for-
lorn,
Unheralded, they came. Hatless was she,
Ill-kempt, slack-shod, her garments shabby-worn.
His arm fast locked, she leaned and with her eyes
Searched his: her lips spelled Paradise.
A little, dingy city-bred was he.

A Pathway to the Stars

So they passed on, adown that sodden street,
Together, in sweet, isolate disdain;
And so the mist closed in behind their feet
Who went so foolish-free of all delight
Through that amazing, pitiless, foul night;—
Two moon-mad lovers in a country lane.

Oh, high-born stoics!—they had burst the bars,
And dwelt deliberate with freedom; they
Trod the true path, drinking not clouds but
stars:

Souls and not raindrops danced before their eyes,
And in their train a wind blew butterflies. . . .
They passed, and lo—the walks were white with
May.

Brick Walls

ON old brick walls new sunlight falls,
And this . . . suggests a story.

Once, in the far off times, there came,
 On horseback, hunting glory,
A young sir-knight to court, whose fame
Sang through the lists like sudden flame
 And smote the turrets hoary.

He overtoppled horse and man
 In every joust he tilted;
Never there rode since world began
A finer lance with more élan;
 And as he struck, they wilted.

Brick Walls

Flower and pride, young blade and old,
They bit the dust before him;
Doffed at the dais his casque, down rolled
Ringlets and ringlets of gold on gold
The sea wind scattered o'er him.

Then must the trumpets split in twain
The hush that rose around him;
Over his head the victor's chain,
The blossomy wreath, the flushed disdain
Of glory that had found him.

"Only a boy!"—the murmur ran;
"A boy, to humble giants!"
The king made sport, as brave kings can:
"What!—was there no mustachioed man
To beard this boy's defiance?"

The House That Was and Other Poems

“Where is the brace of gallant blades

Who strutted through a measure,

Last evening, with as many maids?

To-night, I wot, not hearts but spades

Must serve my royal pleasure!”

He made him captain of his host,

This golden, gifted stranger;

In public state he drank his toast,—

Wined him and dined him, oft, but most

He tempered him with danger.

On nine great battlefields the boy

Strewed victory behind him;

The hotter fight, the fiercer joy:

His shield showed Mars, who cried “Destroy!”

But he himself outshined him.

Brick Walls

It seemed the world was his, who rose

Like day-dawn, in bright rapture:

He might have snatched the crown; who knows?

Him, at the brink, his frightened foes

By treachery did capture.

He never saw the sky again,

Whose age was love-and-laughter;

They walled him up, and hung a chain,

Heavy with iron links and pain,

On him forever after.

Once, when his friends, by stealth, I'm told,

Wrought bribery to aid him;

Inside a cask they hid, and rolled

Him, joyful; but one hair of gold

Escaped them and betrayed him.

The House That Was and Other Poems

He never saw his peaks of snow
 Again, young hooded eagle;
But pined away long years of woe.
The prisoner's name was Enzo;
 His flight of fame was regal.

Sometimes, when the sunlight falls,
 In springtime, through the city,
And dies of heartbreak on brick walls—
God never meant it should—cold walls—
 I think of him, and pity.

I think of boyish Enzo,
 Bright moulded unto glory;
Who never, never more could know
The free, wide air, the battle glow.
 (Spring sunlight . . . and a story.)

Wharves and Warehouses

TILTED stacks and sprawling cranes;
Shrewd cries and engine screech;
 Hoofs that pound,
 Blows that sound;
Cotton bales and coffee grains;
Cargoes swung in looped-up chains;—
 Oaths and vulgar speech.

Next the wharf a warehouse lies:
Shuttered windows thwart the day,
 And within
 Dies the din;—
On the fragrant darkness dies,

The House That Was and Other Poems

Where rich heaps of merchandise

Doze the hours away.

All agog with ebb and flow,

Life is like a wharf, it seems.

Rough, rude men

We are, then.

But, behind the noise and show,

There are silences we know,—

Warehouses of dreams.

The Sky from a Dentist's Chair

DULL attic windows blankly stare,—
 A pitiless horizon;
Over the roofs the sky is fair;
I probe it from the plush-proud chair
 That all my daring dies on.

How free and favored is a sky,
 With naught to have a care to!
How sweetly soft the clouds drift by;—
How happily they float, while I
 An anguished tooth am heir to!

The House That Was and Other Poems

Nay, Mother Earth, they do not well

Who knead thee with such leaven;

Good flesh and blood's too choice to sell; —

Better a mortal man, in Hell,

Than shapeless mist, in Heaven!

For Value Received

HE chirped, the farmer's boy, the team
Tugged at the plough at break of day;
He drove straight furrows, but his dream
Was of the city, far away.

In the north woods a noble pine
Aimed at the stars its poignant youth.
They felled it, pleading this, in fine:
Truth must have paper. Long live Truth!

* * * * *

The House That Was and Other Poems

The very sparrows know it; he—
Poor, blear-eyed sinner, sprawling there
On the park bench, dejectedly—
Is harmless. (How a man would scare!)

A paper with blurred print is prone
On the wet walk, brief life at end;
(How quickly stale is news!) the stone
Clings to it closely, friend to friend.

(God, on our hurried hearts look down!)
Is it, oh, is it good that we
Forget the price that paves the town?
This was a man; that was a tree.

Sanctuary

LIKE sparks above a windy fire,
Stars in the dawn-draft drifted higher;
Deep-etched, the pines in distance grew
Clearer against the sky; then dew
Woke on the grass; a bold cock crew,—
And all the birds came, choir on choir.

I dressed, and as I turned the stair
The sunlight was already there;
The windy sky was washed with rain,—
A flash of gold the weather-vane;
In grey and green, along the lane,
The frisking willows loosed their hair.

The House That Was and Other Poems

That was this morning: not yet noon,
And I am back again—so soon.
This is the happy holiday,
The village folk are blithe and gay;
I was not happy there to-day,—
I found it strangely out of tune.

Often as not, when I am glad,
And fling myself on life, with mad,
Most eager merriment of eyes,
A veil of cloud creeps up the skies;
The wind turns cold; a woman sighs:
I laugh; but vainly—I am sad.

Sanctuary

And so to-day: its joys, in view,
Woke me before the dawn came through.
I did my dreams of gaiety;
And they are done, and I am he
Who comes, unhappy, here, to be
Quiet, my old, old friend, with you.

Scholars in Stained Glass¹

A LEDGE of silence lifted from the sea;
They care not, here, what surge is forged below,—
With faces to the dawn, how windily
Over their heads the shattered storm-clouds go:
They heed not, save of far horizons, dim
With doubtful prophecies, or flecked with
dreams;
Seeing the lanterns and fast-fading spars
Of happy convoys slipping down the rim,
Beyond pale western islands and the beams
Of misted moons that breathe upon the stars.

¹ A window in St. Paul's School, Concord, N. H.

Scholars in Stained Glass

They too had dreams; on many a wind-blown

West

Unbarred their casements, and with wistful eyes
Into the evening's cloudy palimpsest

Peered deep. Much more they were than wise,

Who heard the music piping shepherds made

On olive slopes in snow-crowned Sicily,

And watched the bacchic chorus cleave the glade

With thyrsus rod and midnight mirth and

wine;—

Who lost the songs of Sappho in the sea,

And sat at meat with Plato the divine.

In reverend stole and ample velvet gown,

Pacing sequestered precincts as of yore,

Into young eyes benignantly look down

The great Erasmus and Sir Thomas More.

On winter nights warm sconces from within

The House That Was and Other Poems

Waft out their colors on the drifted snow;
And in charmed twilight, when late birds begin,
From these fond panes fades out the First of
June.

Ah, youth is short, the heyday is too soon;—
Scholars of olden time, we would not go.

The deep tides quicken, now, the West blows
dim,

Who sails to-night goes seaward with the wind;
Who sails to-night will take one prayer with him
For old, lost altars blurring-out behind:
And in some city of vain gods will turn
Down barren streets, at ending of the day,
And of a sudden be with them who are
Here characterized; made deathless, as are they.
Oh, deathless draught of beauty, to discern,
Over estranging years, that one white star!

The Minster Statue on Christmas Eve¹

THE storm has ceased for you below,
Up here the flakes still fly;
In sweeping gusts they come and go
About these battlements of snow:
With you the worst is by.

The comfort of your homeward feet
Is missing, here on high;
Ye darken down each twilight street,
And some ye pass and some ye greet:
Here it is open sky.

¹ By kind permission of *Scribner's Magazine*.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Happy, ye make your candles glow,

Each tree a cherub shrine;

Happy, your stars are kindled so:

Out of the rifts of whirling snow

I grope the skies for mine.

The branches of your gracious trees

Are tenderly bowed down;

Ye scatter gifts, of joy and ease:

My gifts are thorny galaxies,—

A cross, or else a crown.

My sword-hilt sparkles at my side;

Accoutered still, I stand:

Ye ride no more, who once did ride

With levelled lance and puissant pride,

To carve me through the land.

The Minster Statue on Christmas Eve

My bells, with thunder in their throats,

Make music where ye are;

The clamor of their earthquake notes

Down to your peaceful valleys floats

Like starlight from a star.

The storm has ceased for you below,

Up here the flakes still fly;

In sweeping gusts they come and go

About these battlements of snow:

With you the worst is by.

The Flag

WE left Saint Michael's Mount; we left the sea,
And struck straight inland with the freshening
wind

Into a country very fair and free;—
Of fields and woods and rolling hills behind,—
The pleasant fief of Anne of Brittany.

Full seven days we wandered up and down
In deep antiquity, but marvelled more
At maidens' caps—which marked a different
town—

Or men with streamers, or what children wore,
Than all of Baedeker's close-cropped renown.

The Flag

Full seven days in that enchanted land,
Like children with new Christmas toys, we hung
On each fresh glimpse, each open doorway
scanned,

Hearing no echoes of our English tongue,
Looking in faces slow to understand.

Full seven days: then turned reluctantly,
Through long, grey villages, towards home again;
Till, tasting salt, a wind from tree to tree
Came shouting: then a headland, green with
grain,

And out beyond it, shimmering, the sea.

The Coast of Emerald! How strange to eyes
Grown shy with country solitudes, the throng;
The gay hotels and streets; how loud the cries!—
And, oh, how lately lost, and yet, how long,
That very morning's quiet fields and skies!

The House That Was and Other Poems

A bending bow, the beach curved to the land,
Its brink wreathed round with breakers and
 bright foam;

Where girls and boys, like Greeks, gone hand in
 hand,

Stepped through the shallows. Up the shore
 was Rome,

A frowning league of castles in the sand.

Piled up like laughter: each artificer
With his good spade had wrought to his desire,
And they who builded them proud patriots were;
Upon each rampart rippled forth, like fire,
A Marseillaise of sun—the tricolore.

We watched them, smiling, hearts still left behind
In ancient peace; till, suddenly made known,
A new flag woke, and fluttered free, and shined.

The Flag

A tiny bit of silk some child had flown,
Its stars swept France, and France went down
the wind.

All the sweet lure of storied lives that lay
Long-buried in that legendary mould;—
All the charmed past, grew dim and died away;
And lovely, in clean sunlight, young, not old,
Our own land smiled: sad, outworn myths were
they.

Once Upon a Time

THEY told me beauty was all, long ago,
Lived out and sealed in cerements of cold time;
Tombed with sad obsequies, wept and laid low,
Beyond the reach of subsequent renown:
The age of gold, they said, had spent its prime,
Once; and forever after, blown sublime,
In one long sunset hopelessly went down.

They told no truth, for as bright flowers decline,
And leave pale ghosts for winds to waft away,
Beauty but breathed, and lo, like Proserpine,
Their gloomings vanished, suddenly, in air:
Beauty but breathed, once, gently, half in play,

Once Upon a Time

And now I know there is no yesterday
Where beauty breathes; time is not tasted there.

I celebrate no fount whose waters flow
From sacred hill-slopes, haunted of old rhyme
Since raptured Helicon burst out below,
And Aganippe matched the Hippocrene
Impatient Pegasus struck forth from slime;
But a mere brook, in no heroic time,
Flowing through meadows full of early green.

Nor sing I, as did shepherds, piping praise,
Of nymphs they startled, featly, by a stream,
At top of noon, when flocks were left to graze;—
Haply a herdsman, seeking out some shade,
In reverie the while, half thought, half dream;
Who saw, then luckless lost, in one white gleam,
The naked shoulders of no mortal maid.

The House That Was and Other Poems

The brook I sing has no such deities,
But white of cloud and dark of end-of-day;
Its willows weep no broken threnodies,
Over its pebbles flute no pipes of Pan;
Yet lovely is, no less: the lips of May
Bend to its brink, and all along its way
A new song opens where each ripple ran.

Here you and I, one day, spring-wandering,
Came, through the fields, the sun was hot, and
high;

And laughing, all alone, nor parleying,
Doffed hose and shoon, a very girl and boy,
To try (we knew, but still, we had to try)
Whither it went and whence it came—and why;
And lost, at once, the purpose in the joy.

A falling tree had bridged a quiet pool;
You perched on it, and swung a searching toe,

Once Upon a Time

Just reaching, just—oh, bliss!—the waters cool,
While I (you urged) went boldly overside
Into brave depths: then, straightway, must we go
Where rapids called us, out of sight, below,
And revelled all the way there, through the tide.

A very girl and boy; so went our play,
And never thought between us, once, there fell
(We were as young as shadows, and as gay)
Of how we looked, or what we said—or wore,
Till, sudden, turning; why, I cannot tell—
I walked not earth but fields of asphodel—
A wind blew heaven wide; I passed the door.

Marble and bronze have great artificers
Touched into tearful likeness of their dreams,
And left a few, unaging visioners
To hold forever, faintly, from afar,

The House That Was and Other Poems

To some lost beauty trailing off its beams
Beyond the silence, and the sound of streams,—
The last, thin radiance of a fallen star.

Singers have been who caught the drifting fire;—
Some low-born boy impoverished of gold,
Who trembled past the outposts of desire,
And uttered, in one crescent-moonèd strain,
Imperishable secrets of untold,
Unearthly blisses raining down from old,
Forbidden sanctities of vanished pain.

But living beauty, beauty breathing-on,—
No chisel questions it, no pale lips rim:
Dear God!—to see you where the wind had
gone,
All in soft shadow, still as Paradise,
Knee-deep, and lifting from the water's brim

Once Upon a Time

Your looped-up garments . . . Star-eyed seraphim

Came down and kissed you, kneeling, with their eyes.

You never knew; two heart-beats long, no more,
I worshipped—yet, eternities were they:

You stirred, I woke, we frolicked as before.

You never knew what light was in your hair,—

What rush of rapture caught my soul away;

But I—I know there is no yesterday

Where beauty breathes; time is not tasted there.

Reason Has Spoken: Romance Replies

DRAW me a line, you say?—then another?
Letter them so; here an A, there a B?
X follows sure—I admit it, brother;
X and your smile, and your smug “Q.E.D.”

But—if your B, in the meanwhile, elfish,
Chafes to be penned, like a child in a pew;
Dances about, is impatient, selfish,—
What of your X?—there’s the devil to do.

Life and pure reason;—say moonshine, rather:
Fashion a yardstick to measure rain,
Stinting your roof—’seems a deal of pother;
Better stop leaks and let lakes remain.

Reason Has Spoken: Romance Replies

Nay, what is worse with you—plumb-line and
measure,—

Probing through life from the front to the back,
Is—you spill out the spice and the pleasure,
All the pure juice for the pulp that you lack.

I—and O heart of me, be it spoken
Bravely as bugles—I choose not to know.
Shake out the odds; what!—failure's the token?
So much the better; I lose, but—I go!

Horses and saddles, a road of danger;
Midnight and moonlight, stiff gauntlets and lace;
Swords out of saddle for every stranger;
Hint of a quarrel in each sudden face.

Whither? who cares?—give a pence to sorrow;
Toss the poor beggar an alms, then ride—

The House That Was and Other Poems

Over the hills to the dawn; the morrow
Leaps with a laugh to the lips of his bride!

She that I rode for and fought for, surely,
Out of the mist, will be mine at the last . . .
Oh, you may smile; *she* can smile, demurely;
Nevertheless—I could wish it were past.

Draw me a line, you say?—then another?
Letter them so; here an A, there a B?
X follows sure—I admit, brother;
There . . . (and the door-slam has spilt out the
key).

Once in a Life

You have broken the bowl of golden glass
 On the flags of aching stone:
You have broken the spell, and the splendors pass;
 I had thought . . . I should have known.

Once in a life, they say; is it true?
 There is much to mend again:
I remember our earliest smile; do you?
 The night the wind smelled rain.

It is best, perhaps; one might have swooned;—
 Been blissful and never stirred:
As it is—who wears an open wound
 Is wakeful; or so I've heard.

The House That Was and Other Poems

All those children with wildflowers, yesterday,
 Were they real? and the buds they bore?
Did they laugh as I listened? Did you say
 It was friendship and nothing more?

You have broken the bowl; well, let it pass;
 It was written; I should have known:
(I will gather these crumbs of jewelled glass)
 There . . . I have knelt . . . on the
 stone.

To-day

I BRING YOU all my olden days,
 My childhood's morning glow;
I love you down the meadow ways
 Where early blossoms blow:
And up deep lanes of long-gone-by,
 Shining with dew-drops yet,—
I wander still, till you and I
 Over the world are met.

I bring you all my lonely days,
 My heart that hungered so;
I love you through the wistful haze
 Of autumns burning low:

The House That Was and Other Poems

And on pale seas, beneath wan sky,

By weary tides beset,

I voyage still, till you and I

Over the world are met.

I bring you all my happy days,—

Armfuls of flowers—oh,

I love you as the sunlight stays

On mountains heaped with snow:

And where the dearest dream-buds lie,

With tears and dew-drops wet,

I toss to-day; for you and I

Over the world are met!

Images

ONCE, from a valley, deep in shade,
I saw a cloud go by;
Richly in sunlight all arrayed,—
A rose-leaf in a sky.
Thou art to me, dear, like that cloud,
Far-floating down the West;
Serene and pure and perfect-browed,—
Alone and loveliest.

Once, in a crowded concert hall,
I heard a master play;
One air out-lingered through it all,
A rainbow in bright spray.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Thou art to me, dear, like that air;

In all the changing years

Poised, unforgettable and fair,

Over a mist of tears.

Once, on a beach which foam had rimmed

White, where the tide was low,

I found a shell all overbrimmed

With brine the sea left so.

Thou art to me, dear, like that shell,

Light-lying on the sand,

An ocean in its fluted well;—

That did not understand. . . .

Castles in Spain

A PEACOCK struts on the balustrade,
The ivy is old on the wall;
Over the roofs, like an accolade,
The mellowing sunbeams fall;
And it's always drowsy and afternoon,—
Yes, always, afternoon,
As I climb the hill and look through the grille
Of the gates that are closing soon.

First is a garden of bygone days,
Sweet William and thyme and rue;
Spattering lillies, a fountain plays;
A sun-dial blinks at the blue;

The House That Was and Other Poems

And it's always drowsy and afternoon,—

Yes, always, afternoon,

As I come again to my castle in Spain,

Up the garden walks, in June.

Next is a moat, and a drawbridge high,

With chains, and a seneschal

Who clanks it down with a long-drawn sigh,

At my brave "What ho! I call!"

And it's always drowsy and afternoon,—

Yes, always, afternoon,

As I lift my head to the haughty tread

Of an ancient hunting tune.

I pass the court-yard, and entering,

I stride through the banquet hall;

I reach a door with a secret spring,

And open it—quick—in the wall;

Castles in Spain

But it's always drowsy and afternoon,
 Yes, always, afternoon,
As I gain the stair that is waiting there,
 In a turret, and then—I swoon.

Someday, perhaps, a dream will be kind,
 And leave me longer in there;
Someday, yes, someday, perhaps I'll find
 Who waits on that turret stair;
But it won't be drowsy and afternoon,—
 Oh, no, not afternoon;
I shall kiss your face in some starlit place,
 While nightingales wake to the moon,—
 Ah, me—
Dim nightingales waked by the moon.

Sailed: S. S.—

THE singing tides go out to sea;
Then turn, and come in again;
But ships are different; they sail, and we
Are left alone, in the rain.

They stand so still, the whole week through,
Like steeds at a tavern door:
Comes time to mount—there's work to do;
But parting is something more.

Their white wakes fade full fast behind,—
The sea is forgetful soon;
But we, forlorn, turn back to find
Dead leaves that the wind has strewn.

Till the Last Wave Sings

WONDERFUL winds are blowing
Over the broad blue sea;
Wonderful ships are going
Clear of the harbor quay:
Gallantly breaks in thunder
Proud canvas from the sky;
Lee rails are rolling under,
Bright spindrift flashes by.

(REFRAIN)

Sail, oh, sail, with outspread wings;
Go to my love, and say

The House That Was and Other Poems

I will be true till the last wave sings,
And the stars are washed away!

Rocks where the tide-rip clashes
With clogging seaweed bloom;
Reefs where the white spray dashes,
And glutted caves of gloom:
Ships into distance merging
With clouds, far-off and low;—
Give rein, they need no urging;
Loose them and let them go!

(REFRAIN)

Here, in the twilight places,
I used to walk with her;
Here, where a thousand faces
Make one face lovelier:

Till the Last Wave Sings

Out of the harbor streaming,

The ships go bravely by ;

Desolate, out of my dreaming,

I watch them pass, and cry :

(REFRAIN)

Landward

OVER the side, over the side,
 Ever the same is the sea;
Out of the drift the white waves lift,
 Driving unendingly:
Sunrise was red, and day is sped,
 Gold, on a glooming sea;—
Oh, to be near, oh, to be near
 Land, and be loved by thee!

Deep in thine eyes, deep in thine eyes,
 Ever the same as the sea,
Shadows bend low, sun-ripples flow,
 Changing enchantingly:

Landward

Stars in the dim evenlight swim,

Soft, on a violet sea;—

Oh, to be near, oh, to be near

Land, and be loved by thee!

All of a while, all of a while—

Ever the same is the sea—

Clouded with gold, when will unfold

Hills of that far countrie?

Pale in the sky the moon, held high,

Lanterns a lonely sea;—

Oh, to be near, oh, to be near

Land, and be loved by thee!

The Urban Shepherd

Not so Theocritus in crystal song
Imprisoned shepherds and white flocks of sheep.
Wide fields were theirs, and solitudes so long,
With pipes of rough-notched reed they passed the
 day,
And stretched, when noon was hot, in shade for
 sleep,
Or sighed for Chloe, when the clouds turned
 grey.

With floating fillets they entwined their hair,
And footed it with lasses in a ring:
Warm milk, from wooden bowls, they quaffed;
 their fare

The Urban Shepherd

Was bread and cheese, or honey from the hive.
Of such Theocritus loved well to sing;—
How should he sing them now, were he alive?

Here in the city park, strait-laced with trees,
Its scanty sward made prim with garden lore,
How can a shepherd posture at his ease,
Or frolic on his pipe a love-sick strain?
Alas, he cannot; idylls are no more;
The dead Adonis comes not back again.

O sheep that munched sweet grass on windy
slopes

Of Ida, when young Paris, lolling there,
Beguiled Aenone with bright, boyish hopes
And golden feathers of plumed vows, how fall
They whom tradition wraps not in charmed air!
(Park sheep eat peanuts, eat them shells and all.

The House That Was and Other Poems

I've seen them, shameless things! What race or
breed

Is there, on sea or land, will not? What pride
Remains in men or squirrels, that will feed
On such glib food; on fodder so inept?
Lions, you say? Perhaps: I never tried
The king of beasts; I feared he might—accept.)

Huddled together by a silly throng
I came upon some sheep not long ago;
Cresting a hill-top, blundering along,
Brown-backed (not white) and bold beyond
amaze.

(One tried to eat my camera.) Ah, no,
Not these, not now, Theocritus could praise.

Their shepherd, even less; no cloak had he,
Nor legs cross-gartered (oh, theatric lore!);

The Urban Shepherd

He leaped not, piping, as in poesy,
Nor stalked morosely with a tragic frown:
Clothes of a common citizen he wore;
Unnoticed he might walk, in any town.

“Perhaps he haunts a Dairy Lunch,” I mused;
But even this left comfort in the cold.
Sadly I turned away: “Not thus they used
Aspiring poets, in old times,” I said:
“No wonder men could sing in the great gold
Of early dawn: but now—those days are dead.

“Color is killed: the world one monotone.
We have no atmosphere to temper sight.”
But as I drooped on this, discouraged, lone,
The faces of that crowd swam through my sighs,
And beauty, blossoming, broke out in light.
Not mirth I saw, but hunger, in their eyes.

For the Dedication of a Toy Theatre ¹

You banished fairies and lean outlawed elves,
Immured in dusty books on closet shelves;
You exorcised young spirits that have lain,
Cooped up with cobwebs, in a cynic's brain;
You goblins and good fellows, mischief mites
That drank the cream and teased the dog,
 o' nights;
You godmothers; you witches on old brooms;
You prancing princes (coal-black hair, and
 plumes),
Maidens, magicians, ogres, Jacks-in-vines,
Con your enchantments, furbish up your lines,

¹ By kind permission of *Scribner's Magazine*.

For the Dedication of a Toy Theatre

Make ready for revival—not so fast!—

You shall be summoned when the play is cast.

And you, grown old too early, you whose eyes

Have lost the wonder of the truly wise;

You scoffers armed with “science” and a laugh,

Who know the world and scorn the better half;

You, also, looking backward with regret,

Who catch some glimmers of late childhood yet;

And you who never wandered, skimped indeed,

Beyond the borders of the hard world’s need;

But most, you children, holding in your hearts

The ways of highest heaven, best of arts,

Be seated here. Yon curtain is the mind:

Let logic slip, and—laughter is behind.

Ay, laughter, and brave deeds, and hopes come

true,—

The old sweet world of fancy, made for you.

But mark you, disenchantment’s nigh at hand;

The House That Was and Other Poems

Whoever questions will not understand.

Look to't: and, as you love us, we entreat,

Put off your cares; a smile will buy your seat.

Ho! actors! come, make ready there within;—

Have up the curtain; let the play begin!

The Man of God

As boyhood waned, the prophecies began.
He would hear silence broken overhead
By voices whispering where no winds ran:
“Look up!—look up! Behold and see!”—they
said.

There wrapped him then such modesty of eyes,—
Such melting loveliness enmisted him,
As veils the cloudless peaks of Paradise,
And folds the wings of fainting seraphim.

It passed, and left him prone upon the ground,
Often as not with wildflowers, or the tune
Of a sweet brook, whereby he slowly found
His human speech once more, and shed the swoon.

The House That Was and Other Poems

And ever after, what the wildflowers spoke,—
What words were in a brook, to him lay bare:
Eyes on the ground, his heart filled full, and
broke,

With very blissfulness of being there.

So great his joy, he sang it on his way;
But men, the most of men, flung cold disdain:
“Here is no prophet, prophets are not gay;
He brings glad tidings, they, eternal pain.

Came preachers, then, with critical dispraise,
Pouring detraction on his lowly head:
“He is not orthodox; he does not raise
His eyes to God.” “I do not dare”; he said.

The poor, the sick, the children, took him in,
He sang them songs and gave them of his cheer;

The Man of God

He preached to birds and shrived them of their
sin,

He wept, and flowers wept with him, tear for
tear.

At last, with folded hands he must down lie,
To lay his mortal dust among the dead.

“The world is beautiful; it passes by;—

I loved it: now—I will look up!”—he said.

Baal

(I. Kings 18:26.)

CRUSHING weight and cruel size,
And in the eyes
No shadowing of pity, but slow flames
Of sleeping lust,
And old, bad triumphs sifting out their names
Through death and dust.

Thou art all Earth's, ay, utterly thou art,
Grim counterpart
Of ugly crags and soaring plinths that go
Into blind snow;
Huge as the heave of some anarchic head
Out of Perdition's bottomless black bed,

Baal

All wreathed in slime:
Godlike, rough-shapen, high, unhallowèd,
Thou art all Earth's, yet, earth-born, hast no
 dread
Of braying Time.

Before thee, awful, dark—a grave of sound—
Goes drifting by
Sad wreckage of lost hopes: young laughter,
 drowned;
Trothplights, betrayed; creeds that were never
 crowned—
Jetsam and flotsam, cringing round and round,
Each with its cry.
But thou art severed; none is in thine ears:
Only thou hearest, as in shells one hears,
Old deafened thunders of defeated years
Blown back to die.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Voices by night and faces in the day;

The wind's are they

Who are the thralls of thee; the wind's to blow

Down flickering aisles of forests, far and slow;—

Fading away:

Griefs in the night, a sea of sighs by day;

The winds are they.

“O Baal, hear!—not yet is bud made bloom,

Not yet unfold

Those petals of surpassing sweet perfume

Our clenched hands hold:

Before our feet a veil of shadow falls,

A chilling breath goes by, a far voice calls;

A sudden silence echoes in our halls;—

Cold . . . we are cold.

“Give us the flame!—not love nor wealth, nor
lands,

Baal

Nor winged fame;
We have them all, see—in our broken hands—
Plucked in thy name:
We that are strong ask but a little thing;
Give us our hearts again, hearts that would sing;
Give us an end of cold and hungering;—
Give us the flame!”

Thou dost not, ever: neither hast thou heard
A single word.
Yet, deep within thee, quenchless futures burn;
Thine eyes upturn
The wind-blown ruins of the past; thy gaze
Levels the Pyramids, dreaming back through haze
Of buried dooms;
Beyond remotest memory; always
Over lost altars hollow with old praise;—
Altars—and tombs.

Sudden Death

It was a gentle day:
Here in America, far away,
Was peace, and a sweet June day.
A south wind touched the sea,
From over the sea's broad brim;
The diamonds danced delightfully
On every ripple's rim,
And only the haze, far out to sea,
Till noon had struck—then, in the West
A towering cloud tossed up his crest:—
The wind died out for him.

Dark in the North,
And deeper dark stood forth;

Sudden Death

Then cavern growls of thunder stirred,
Till other thunders, waking, heard,
And surly, roared reply.

A sinful sky,—

A wicked, ragged sky,

A sky that grew

Greenish of hue,—

A sickly, tortured, squeamish sky,

Wherethrough

Great anguish drew.

Then rain,

Sweeping the main,

Like long grey garments, came;—

Then hurricane.

The trees, poor trees,

Their sanctities,—

Their leafy, summer sanctities

The House That Was and Other Poems

Outraged and torn!

And, oh, the flowers in gardens gay,

Ravished and ruined beyond repay,—

The stalwart stalk and the glad young spray,—

Drooping forlorn!

The wild rose, shorn

Of her petals, her pride,

Wept; but the daises died,

And the hollihocks,

And the phlox,

And the iris—all died.

(Little it cared,—

That hurricane,

With its wind and its rain,

And its fiendish frown.)

Came hail,

And like a flail,

Sudden Death

Beat down

What the wind had spared.

Sunlight again;

Bird-song again;

Rest after rain.

Once more a sky of cloudless blue,

A glistening world, a world made new,

After its pain:

Even for all its wreckage, made new,

Brighter and better, and sweeter, too,—

Sweeter for pain.

For oh, the fragrance everywhere!

As though each flower that died were there;

As though the heart of each flower, in air,

Floated on ecstasies far more rare

Than ever in life its heart could bear;—

The fragrance, the fragrance everywhere!

* * * * *

The House That Was and Other Poems

And they,

Half a world away,

On their poor torn sod,

One wonders if they . . .

Believe it, believe it!—their souls, for aye,

Are sweet in the face of God!

To a White-Throated Sparrow

Not to the near thou singest, bird
Of the cold northern skies;
Far-called thou art, a voice unheard
Speaks, and thy wakeful heart is stirred,
And in like key replies.

Beyond the breath of balsam pine,
And lakes where startled loon
Echo from cliffs that cool the shine
Of daybreak, or in coves combine
With wolves to haunt the moon:

Beyond the dip of paddles; where
No lighted tent can be;

The House That Was and Other Poems

Beyond the smoke of birch, to bear
Clean fragrance through still twilight air,—
There is that calls to thee.

Thou answerest, and art again
Made eager to reply;
Like children down a country lane
Calling at parting, each one fain
To blow the last good-bye.

Rapt singer, in thy sharpened ken
There trembles a dim word;
Thou hearest what is hid from men,
Thou art divine, a dreamer, then—
Only a brown-backed bird.

A Hill Touched Heaven

A HILL touched heaven, and heaven touched the
hill.

One moment; then were twain once more.

* * * * *

Wind in the grass, you are unwitting still;
Bare boughs, you roar
With mad March music, heedless as before,
And flying shadows, you whom fluffed clouds
spill

Right into sunshine—solemn blinks of eyes—
It was not told to you:
Nor unto you, great overarching gulf of blue.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Are you more wise,
You little last year's leaf, the hillside holds?—
You with your sunset reds and deep, dull golds,
Your wrinkles and your crinkles, and the shy,
Sweet look you have, of keeping,
Locked in your heart and sleeping,
A dream you knew
And hid into silence? I
Am not so sure of you.

Can it be you heard,
You bird
On the far-away branch, with your song that came
Out of full throat, like flame?
Or was it just reproach of flowers
In this cold North of ours:
Calling them, warm southern wooer, calling
them,

A Hill Touched Heaven

Who would not wave at you a single stem?

I do not think you heard,

You bird.

But I . . . I heard.

God stirred.

The Passing of Sixteen

UNCLASP the girdle all entwined
Of roses rare;
Put off the wreath wherewith you wind
Your loose long hair:

Let one pale candle burn, then blow
All light away;
Open the casement, softly, so . . .
March is like May.

Low through the tree stems, petal-wide,
The red moon gleams:
A faint wind stirs, and having sighed,
Sinks into dreams.

* * * * *

The Passing of Sixteen

Once more the city turns, to-night,
 Weary of walls;
Young laughter fills it, and the flight
 Of gay footfalls.

Long from my window, languidly,
 I look and lean:
A street-car dies . . . a clock strikes . . . She
 Is seventeen!

Apple Blossoms

WHITE music of the sun,
It is done,
The dreamed is done;
Out of the vast
Invisible, beauty is born, at last;
Out of the blue,
Blessing has come, Heaven is won;—
White music of the sun,
It is true, it is true!

Petals of dawn,
Impregnate pink with such a flush of rose

Apple Blossoms

As overflows
Inviolate peaks, and burns, and glows,
Red rose, hot rose, warm rose, pale rose,
And is withdrawn,
And dawn
Melts into day-white: so—they uncloze.

Magical trees,
Holding heavenly harmonies,—
For just a breath, tip-strewn with fire
Of attained desire;
For just one point of aim,
Flung white with flame
Of little cherub wings, that are
Imprisoned music broken on a star:
(Celestial choir,
In outmost antiphon,
Lighted upon

The House That Was and Other Poems

These

Most humble trees.)

Flowering trees,

Fringes of blissful, invisible seas;

Whispering home

Of each wave crest made manifest

Here, in white foam,

That was first, an unseen,

Then a dream,

Then Earth stepped between

And it broke—each one broke—

And awoke

Here, on these apple-boughs, sistered with green:

(Mystic unseen;

That were seas once, and trees once,

And now again are

Each a bud—or a star.)

Apple Blossoms

Sweet-smelling trees
That the bees
Are implored-of and plunder, trees
Delicious to climb
In the happy springtime,
For children; trees
Full of ecstasies,
Rhapsodies, May music, blown
Out of meadows
Where shadows
Lie soft and alone,
And birds gaily sing
Out of thickets and hedgerows:—
For spring is most spring
In the orchards, where edged grows
With pink and with dawn rose,
In foam and in song throes,
This beautiful thing,

The House That Was and Other Poems

This wonderful thing,—

The apple, the apple, that blooms in the spring!

Amorous month of May,

What a day,—

What a golden day!

How the warm breeze

Ruffles the foam on the apple trees;—

How the birds sing

As they swing

To and fro on a spray;

How each bud's way is sweet love's way;—

Amorous month of May,

To-day—to-day—

It is spring, it is spring, it is spring!

Summer Evening

SOFT as a sigh, faint as a cry
 Blown from a hill-top in childhood;
Flushes the sky, deepen and die
 Marshland and meadow and wildwood.

Dropped where the bay widens away,
 Wistful, a light-house is lurking;
Out with the day, ghostly and grey,
 Seaward a schooner is working.

Frogs in the fen, sheep in the pen;
 Crickets and night-birds creaking;
Voices of men, silence, and then—
 Laughter and muffled speaking.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Waves on the shore, music, an oar,—

Stars and the incense of clover;

Twilight before; twilight no more;—

Long was the day, but it's over.

To Sibylla, on a Raft

WE might be leagues from land, we two,
For all the world counts, now and here;
I might be Captain Kidd, and you—
The girl who wrecked a buccaneer.

You were aboard a galleon, bound
For traffic in the southern seas;
We caught you when you ran aground,
Just as you felt the off-shore breeze.

Our swivel-gun coughed honest lead
Athwart your lordly bows of gold;
I cracked your coxcomb captain's head,
And scooped ripe bullion¹ from the hold.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Your crew, then, down the jolly plank
We sent, with horrid shouts of glee.
They blew brave bubbles as they sank:—
I took you off and put to sea.

You were a lady in distress,
And I, a pirate, gently born:
I served you in all humbleness,
And meekly stood your frozen scorn.

But luck, with you aboard, went wrong,
A raging tempest racked our souls:
It scourged us like a white-hot thong;
We ran before it with bare poles.

And then—such leeway we had made—
After the wind had ceased to whine,
We could not ply our gentle trade,
And cursed a blank horizon line.

To Sibylla, on a Raft

Then baffling winds and calms took turns
In thwarting us from beating back:
My first mate died of powder burns,
Our mainmast opened up a crack.

The crew blamed you; I took your side;
Dark looks flared up in mutiny:
They plumped us promptly—for a ride—
Upon this raft, in empty sea.

Revenge!—revenge!—we wreaked it soon;
The tipsy rout were no more seen:
An earthquake tossed them to the moon;—
Their revels retched the magazine.

Life isn't story-book, it's true;
But just this moment, now and here,
I *might* be Captain Kidd, and you—
The girl who wrecked a buccaneer.

To Lucia, in the Hospital

It seemed a very cruel thing
For you, so new to suffering:
One blamed the thought of sliding steel;
One would not, dared not think it real,
And all the perfect white profaned
By one red slash the need ordained . . .
For you, so new to suffering,
It seemed a very cruel thing.

But now there is a something more;
Your smile is gentler than before,
And like a grey of clearing skies,
All dashed with sunlight are your eyes:

To Lucia, in the Hospital

Your arm upon the coverlet glows
A more transparent depth of rose.
Your smile is gentler than before,
But now there is a something more . . .

I think an angel touched you, Sweet,
When in dark pain you dipped your feet;
(Beauty and Pain in Paradise
Take keepsakes of each other's eyes)
And now, upon the warm earth shore,
Your smile is gentler than before.
When in dark pain you dipped your feet,
I think an angel touched you, Sweet.

The Little Boy to the Locomotive

BIG iron horse with lifted head,
Panting beneath the station shed,
You are my dearest dream come true;—
I love my Dad; I worship you!

Your noble heart is filled with fire,
For all your toil, you never tire,
And though you're saddled-up in steel,
Somewhere, inside, I *know* you feel.

All night in dreams when you pass by,
You breathe out stars that fill the sky,
And now, when all my dreams are true,
I hardly dare come close to you.

The Locomotive to the Little Boy

Boy, whose little, confiding hand
Your father holds, why do you stand
Staring in wonderment at me,—
Poor thing of iron that I be?

Your unsophisticated eyes
Are full of beautiful surprise;
And oh, how wonderful you are,
You little, golden morning-star!

Poor thing of iron that I be,
A mortal man imagined me;
But you—you drop of morning dew—
God and his heaven are globed in you.

Silent Prayer

ONE rose is not enough for love
 To plead with, at thy door;
Though all its petals spoke to thee
 The prayer I plucked it for;—
Though every sweetest precinct of
 Its beauty should implore:
Yet were all roses mine to be,
 They could not tell thee more.

Over a Bunch of Arbutus

CELEBRANT Earth, in amice of white snow,
Do not chant, yet; intone no stave of prayer
To take full choir in tree-tops; have a care
Of echoing arches, lest too soon there go
Into high-vaulted heaven the glory: no,
Speak not at all, while on the April air
This maiden incense lays its beauty bare,
Out of wet leaves November winds brought low.

Laughter, to loss, is treason to the dead,
And Dante's face is guidance for the true;
But this is spring, and weeping wears away
The cold white marble of the uncomforted:
Gentle arbutus, should she dream to-day,
Tell her I smiled, this once—for joy of you.

Lincoln: Fifty Years

GREAT love of God, that moving on the deep,
Imaginest a mighty dawn of gold
From one leal star aloft the midnight cold,
In lonely armament for all who sleep;
What dreams prophetic kindled in thy keep
When Lincoln, claimed, beyond his prairie wold,
Caught up his country's sorrows in brave hold,
And foot by foot, conquered the desperate steep?

Once more, to-day, the sad, deciduous trees
Are full of singing music; once more, wide,
Blow open all the windy doors of spring:
The South, the precious South returns; the breeze
Strews on the graves a happier mentioning . . .
Lincoln lives on; it was the hate that died!

Thomas Chatterton

As one first chord of music, dwelt upon,
Voices another, even ere it dies,—
Down-dropping beauty in the drowsy eyes
Of Melody, new-wakened, and yet wan;
So thou, clear spirit, camest and art gone,
And wouldst have been—what boots it to sur-
mise?

Still echoes, round steep cliffs of Paradise,
The unheard singing of a dying swan.

Low-leaning on the brink I saw him, late,
Beside a pool that sheltered him and Heaven;
Not sorrowful he seemed, a pretty child

The House That Was and Other Poems

Playing at finger-dips with death and Fate,
Till each orb'd star became a shattered seven.
He viewed the wreck; then looked at me, and
smiled.

Windows of Gold

WINDOWS of gold, windows of gold,
Over dark roofs of rain;
Wonderful shapes of the sunset you hold,
Wind-shaken windows, windows of gold,
Over dark roofs of rain.

Windows of gold, windows of gold,
More than sunlight you see;
So might a conquering host behold
Ranges on ranges of peaks unrolled,—
Exulting mightily.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Windows of gold, windows of gold,

Is it a dream of yore?

Something you tell of a story told

Long ago—long ago—dear and old,

My heart is aching for.

Windows of gold, windows of gold,

Over dark roofs of rain;

Now I know—now I know—what you hold,

Wind-shaken windows, windows of gold;—

Triumph, and no more pain!

Due North

ENOUGH: you have the dream, the flame;

Free it henceforth:

The South has given you a name;—

Now for the North.

Unsheathe your ship from where she lies,

In narrow ease;

Fling out her sails to the tall skies,

Flout the sharp seas.

Beyond bleak headlands wistful burn

Warm lights of home;

In shutting darkness frays astern,

Far-spun, the foam.

The House That Was and Other Poems

Come wide sea-dawns, that empty are

Of wet sea sand ;

Come eves, that lay beneath a star

No lull of land.

And whether on faint iris wings

Of fancy borne,

Or blown and breathed, the south wind brings

So much to mourn !

The deep wood-shadows, they that drew

So softly near ;

The violets all veined with blue,—

Be strong, and steer !

There is a silence to be found,

And rested in ;

A stillness out of thought, where sound

Can never win.

Due North

There is a peace, beyond the stir
Of wind or wave;
A sleeping, where high stars confer
Over the brave.

The south winds come, the south winds go,
Caressing, dear;
Northward is silence, and white snow,—
Be strong, and steer!

For in that silence, waiting, lies,
Untroubled, true;—
Oh, eager, clear—like love in eyes—
The soul of you.

That Which Remains

*October sunlight on a lonely stair;
Wistful, with dreaming finger-tips that fade
Along the slender, high-born balustrade:
Shadows where portraits hung—no longer there.*

We saw it so; and now in melting stars
Dissolves away,
Like golden tides behind pale, western bars,
Its bloomed heyday.

Gone, like too early petals that the spring
Weeps, not to save;
Gone, like the foamed white lips of flowers that
cling
To a blue wave.

That Which Remains

Ah, lightly gone—did no voice break with woe?

Were there no tears

To work against the blind, entombing snow

Covering the years?

Did no new-wedded lover sue for thee,

When apple-bloom

Severed with sea-wind and laid bare the sea,

Dark with old doom?

Where are they gone who weathered-out the rain

That dimmed these trees;—

Who heard the early robins and were fain

Of late-toned bees?

Where are they gone who watched beside this
gate,

On many a night,

The House That Was and Other Poems

Star after star pace down deliberate

The dream-dark height?

Ah, lightly gone!—too lightly, too profaned

With travesties!—

The haughty gate-posts regally that reigned,

Are on their knees.

The winding walks, that were a Rome of law,

Are overrun;

Into their midst—who held a world at awe—

Ravens the Hun:

All rank with weeds and grassy ruin, now,

They drink decay.

The trees, crest-fallen, creak in every bough,

So old are they.

So old: by what lost magic of our prime

Is blown the breath

That Which Remains

That tears the tinsel from the cloak of Time,
And stands forth Death?

And thou, old empty house, dost thou remain
In this deep trance
Sleeping, not dead, until warm youth again
Level its lance?

Until fresh songs out of the copsewood leaves
Burst, as of old:
Thinkest thou thus the charm of vanished eves
Yet to behold?

No hand is here to conjure with sweet tones
The vanished times;
No singer meet to wake thy voiceless stones
With wingèd rhymes.

Thou sittest in thy quietude so still,—
So rapt of heart;

The House That Was and Other Poems

Thou art but waiting—be it good or ill;

Surely thou art!

Thou art but waiting, seeing, not with eyes,

Some blissful thing;

Meekly, like Mary hearing in surmise

The angels sing.

Around these wrinkled trunks the shriveled years

Fade out—and will;

But thou art waiting—is it hopes, or fears?—

Thou art so still!

So still, that leaves are listened to, and springs

Make flutes of stones;

So still, the very silence breathes and sings

Forgotten tones.

The leaves lament. The silence answers, so:

“Love does not die;

That Which Remains

And love is beauty, breathing: no, ah, no,
Love does not die!"

We know it, ay, we know it; though our sight
Be not yet plain:
There is no loss that ever questioned—quite—
The deeps of gain.

There is no loss that ever went so far,—
Poor, hurt and blind,
But stealing out of heaven like a star,
Trailed love behind.

And love is beauty, breathing . . . through the
sweet
Old sights and smells,
Like voices of lost Sabbaths at thy feet,
Break out the bells.

The House That Was and Other Poems

*October sunlight on a lonely stair,
Groping with grieving finger-tips that fade
Down the familiar, well-worn balustrade:
Shadows where portraits hung—no longer there.*

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